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## 2-1-1 Testimony for Operation Fuel Public Hearing

*January 10, 2011: 1:00 pm-3:00 pm*

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Good afternoon members of the Appropriations, Energy and Technology and Human Services Committee. Thank you for holding this informational hearing on the need for a Low Income Utility Rate. My name is Kate Quigley and I am the Information Services Lead with the United Way of Connecticut's 2-1-1 service. I have been with the agency for 9 and ½ years.

2-1-1 is a toll-free number accessible throughout Connecticut for anyone looking to get help or give help, 24 hours a day, every day of the year. This is a free help-by-phone information and referral service, and crisis intervention, for Connecticut residents, funded by the State of Connecticut and local United Ways.

- From January 1, 2010 to December 28, 2010 - 2-1-1 received 51,256 requests for utility assistance.
- From January 1 to November 30, 2010 – there were 5,676 people whose requests for utility assistance were not met either because they were not eligible, the service was unavailable, or they had no transportation to go and apply for the services.
- During the summer months, from May 1, 2010 thru August 31, 2010 – 2-1-1 received 14,883 requests for utility assistance.
- During that same time frame, 3,917 people were unable to obtain utility assistance because they were not eligible, the service was unavailable or they had no transportation to go and apply for the services.

When callers present their needs during the assessment, the following are examples of what we hear:

- People have been turned off of their electric and/or gas services or are completely out of oil.
- People are at risk of shut off and do not have the financial means to pay down their balance.
- People have already exhausted the CEAP or CHAP benefits but are still unable to pay the costs of heating their homes.
- People are without heat and are using their gas stoves for warmth and they are unaware how unsafe that is.
- People have to stay in overcrowded situations with friends or family because their home is too cold for them to be in.
- People are simply not aware that any programs are available to assist them during the winter months.
- There are gaps in services where local application sites do not have enough staff to process prioritized applications and clients have to wait to get emergency deliveries.

- Residents who heat with oil are not protected under any winter protection program, unlike customers who heat with electric or gas who can apply for protection.

Typically, 2-1-1 Call Specialists educate callers about the Energy Assistance programs, the application process, eligibility criteria and refer them to the appropriate application sites in their community. Additionally, screening is done for basic needs including food, clothing and shelter. In rare cases, the Call Specialists will have to advocate on behalf of a caller who may have complex needs or who may be faced with barriers or gaps in service delivery.

2-1-1 supports a low-income utility rate and the efforts of Operation Fuel to serve the residents of Connecticut.